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Full Name Last First Middle
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Title of Interview Interview with Patsy Wilson

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Abstract of the content of the interview:

Person Interviewed: Wilson Patsy Jean
Full Name Last First Middle
Known by any other names? (list) _____
Date of Birth 8/23/61

Geographic Places as Subjects within the interview:

<u>AR</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Scary</u>	<u>1961 - 2012</u>
State	County	City/Community	Time Period/Years

Person as Subjects within the Interview:

Sam

Title	Last Name	First	Middle	DOB
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Events as Subjects within the Interview:

<u>Vietnam War & effects</u>	<u>1955 - 1975</u>
Specific	Date(s)

Other Major Places as Subjects within the Interview:

State	County	City/Community	Time Period/Years
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Other Notes: Also talk on growing up in Arkansas

Interview with Patsy Wilson

Interviewer: Matthew Fox

Date of Interview: 3/22/2012

Biography

Patsy Wilson was born in Searcy, Arkansas on August 28, 1961 and she attended school in the Searcy school district. Patsy went to work at what would eventually become the Whirlpool factory and would work there for 33 years. When the factory was shut down Patsy went back to school to learn medical billing and coding. She raised her one son by herself from the time when he was two years old. She has enjoyed raising her son in Arkansas and now she gets to enjoy time with her grandson. Those interested in life in the 1950s in Arkansas and Searcy specifically will find this interview interesting, as well as those interested in the Vietnam War.

Fox: Alright, Patsy. So, what was it like growing up in Arkansas?

Wilson: Well, mainly in a small town like we lived in, back then you didn't have to lock up everything. You could leave your house unlocked, you could leave and go places. Never thought about never thought about anybody breaking in either or stealing anything, you know.

Everybody knew each other, no matter how far around town you got somebody knew who you belonged to. So, you really had to behave yourself or usually you got told on before you ever even made it home. And kids back then were really taught respect. You know, you respected your elders, "Yes, mam. No, mam" and didn't think anything about it. That was just part of growing up that you did and it stays with you all of your life. You're taught that. We played outside all the time. We actually didn't even get air conditioning until I was a junior in high school. We had ceiling fans, everybody did so you didn't know any different. We would even play out late at night, make up our own games to play. We would get like blankets and put it out in the grass and look up in the sky try to pick out different things, make up things, catch lightening bugs, just chase. Things kids don't do now. We had no electronic games. We had three channels on our TV, which was four, seven, eleven and probably ninety-eight percent of the time you didn't get seven. You also had the knob to turn your TV, so if you didn't get something to come in you thumped it with your fingers until it did. Everybody ate at the table together, there was no going to the living room and eating. You had a certain, well our supper time was at six o'clock. No matter what you did, six o'clock you were at the table washed and ready to eat. You behaved or you got up, and you know, you were made to leave the table. And course your mother always snuck you food.

Fox: How has Searcy changed throughout the years as you've grown up?

Wilson: One main thing is how they've redone the high school and put the new fine arts building

in, which is just absolutely beautiful. Other ways, is how much different the school was. We had a dress code, back when I went to school, girls had to wear dresses. There was no pants at all. The boys had to keep their hair cut above their ears and it could not touch their shirt collars, or they were sent home and couldn't come back to school till they got a hair cut. If you wore sandals you had to still wear socks. You could not go to school, this is for the boys mainly, they had to wear socks and if they didn't want to they could not wear their sandals. The desegregation came about when I was in either the fourth or fifth grade. I can't really remember anything bad about it. We basically grew up going to school together and did not know any different. The only difference I remember back then is when we went to the movies, we went in down stairs and they had to go upstairs at the movie house to watch movies. But that is mainly the only thing I can remember. As we got older just everybody played some sort of sports together or was in band together. They just all were friends and there was not any problems. Most women did not work back then, they stayed home and raised their children. There were no computers, no microwaves, especially no electronic stuff at all. We, oh I was gonna say about Race Street wasn't developed at all. It went out probably as far as maybe WW4, I don't remember much further. Until you went way out and we had this one itty bitty place. Just a little hamburger place called The Pit and that's where older kids went to hangout. I was too young so I don't remember a lot about it. I remember they had the best chicken in the town everybody would go out there to get a bucket of chicken for a dollar, but you can't do that now. We had a drive in that was about middle ways out. I don't really remember when they closed it down, I was grown. It is missed by a lot of people because its just part of old times. I remember back when I was little that, you're always seeing people around town now in their jail uniforms and stuff like that working out on work release or whatever. You're always hearing on TV about overcrowded prisons and jails and

all that. We did not have that back then. They had chain gangs back then. I remember as a young person, we were going out of town somewhere, I don't remember what town. I remember seeing the man on the horse and a shot gun in his hand and the prisoners out in the fields working. I only saw that one time in my life, but I did see it. We had no Bebe Capps Highway, course it was only developed a few years ago. No eating joints like we do now. But, I mean there's one on every corner now you did not have those back then. It was very, very, very much of a treat to get to go out to eat, just to get a hamburger back in those days. You just didn't do it very often at all.

Fox: So eating out was a big treat for you all?

Wilson: Yes, the very few times we got to go you would always order like a foot long hotdog with chili and cheese and all that because it would last a long time and you got your choice between that and a hamburger. Well, if you got a hamburger it was gone in just a second and you were still hungry and you did not get to get fries with it because they cost too much. So you got to pick between those two. And therefore, we always got the foot long hotdog where it would last forever. And then one of the things that was an old time landmark was Yarnell's icecream, which has just closed recently. It's just part of Searcy. Downtown we used to have men's stores, we had two of those and your Five and Dime stores, we had a couple of those. What we call pharmacy's now we called drugstores back then and that was mainly the big part. And over we have a courthouse now that is just one of the most outstanding that anybody says around because it dates back so far. And one of the things that I remember about that is when I was younger we used to have to have polio shots before we could start school. They would make a score on your arm and if you did not have the score on your arm you could not start school. Kindergarten was not mandatory, only rich kids got to go to kindergarten. So, therefore we started school in first grade. We also had to go back to the courthouse and go downstairs in the basement and have

polio vaccines given in sugar cubes. They were kind like what we would have as a booster shot now, they were just boosters then. Gas prices were just unbelievable. Course it was high back then, but when I was allowed to start driving the price of it was twenty nine point nine cents a gallon and its running three point sixty nine cents a gallon now, quite a difference.

Fox: So as you grew up what were some of your favorite things to do as a child?

Wilson: Mostly we had a lot that was vacant behind our house. I was mainly raised with boys. There was a couple of girls, but we'd do the dolls and stuff like that everyone and a while, but basically only one other girl besides me. So, I played with the boys and played all kinds of sports in that lot back there from football to baseball. We didn't do basketball much. We didn't know what soccer was, but anyway we would find some kind of ball to play with. I became really well at sports. The boys would get mad because I would be better than they were. They would want to send me home, but my brother stood up for me and told them I was gonna play. Sometimes, mainly baseball, the positions I would play they didn't have anybody else to do it and they would put me there because I was better than they were. We were lucky, in a sense, that traffic wasn't bad. Most of the time nobody could hit it out of what we called our baseball park. Every once and a while you would but you didn't have to worry about it because there was no traffic.

Another thing I liked to do as a kid, when it snowed we stayed out into the snow for hours. I mean our feet would be froze, we would be froze before we would ever go back in. We would go back in and warm up and then go back out again. Now you almost have to beg kids to go out and play in it. We actually even, if you know what Skyline Drive is, we used to have a sled and we would go down Skyline Drive down the hill. Very, very dangerous, we would keep somebody down there at the end to motion to us if a car was coming or not. As I said we didn't have a lot of traffic problems back then so, I don't even remember cars coming too much. So, we stayed out

and we played on that. Like I said before somebody knew who you belonged to. You could not go into Searcy anywhere that someone did not know who you were so you behaved or you got it when you got home. Anyway, we had a ball when it snowed. My recollection, I think we got out of school quite a bit for snow, you know, several days at a time. And we would have so much fun. When I was three years old I learned how to ride a bicycle. I actually sat on the back fender of the bicycle, it was a small one. That's how I guess I was able to sit on it, I don't know.

Anyway, I remember doing that, but mostly I stood up because it was my brother's bicycle. I was a very tiny person I don't know how I ever did this, but they told me all my life I started riding at three because I was the most determined person in the world that I was not gonna let him out do me. Anyway, I learned to ride a bicycle at three. I also learned to take care of myself because the boys would pick on me. Therefore, I was a tomboy. I would not let them out do me. We had a man and a woman that lived next door to us that had a building out behind their house that he had actually made a platform for to put his fishing boat there. Us kids would climb on it and then climb on the top of the building and jump off of it. Which it's a wonder we didn't kill ourselves. I learned how to do that too and being short it was hard for me getting on top of that building, but the building was small and they would dare me to jump off. So, I would do it and it would just about jar my teeth because I was so young. My mother caught them doing it and she would really give them a talking to about trying to coax me into doing things. She'd go back in the house and I would get up there and do it again. I'm very, very lucky that I never got hurt.

Fox: So what jobs have you had here in Arkansas?

Wilson: My main job starting out, I was 22 I believe, 22 or 23, I worked at Maytag. It went from McGraw-Edison to Speed Queen to Maytag to Whirlpool. Whirlpool bought it and closed it down in 2006. I worked there 33 years, I raised a child by myself from age 2, and it was a very

good living. I was paid well, it was wonderful then. When I left there I went back to school and took college courses to do medical billing and coding. I did not successfully get a job because most people who do that don't quit their jobs so they don't come open very often. From there I worked several part time jobs, mainly because the economy was so bad you can't find many jobs. When I lost my job 700 people lost theirs, so that was 700 people looking for work. I was lucky that I even got the part time jobs. Finally, 6 months ago I got a full time job and hopefully I will finish my working years out there, and I will retire from there.

Fox: What are some of the memories from the job that you had?

Wilson: Some of the memories I have from my job at, we always called it Speed Queen, but the main memories I have of that is the closeness that you had with the workers there. There's no explaining how close the workers were, even now we still have kept in touch. I think anyone all they would have to have is a phone call and you would do whatever you could to help them. I don't think there are many places that can say that. It's just an unbelievable attachment is what we had. There were hard times working there and there were many many good times.

Fox: Did the same group of people work there?

Wilson: There were a lot of people who worked there for the long amount of time I had, I think I was number, somewhere between four and eight, I don't remember, in seniority before the plant closed. But there were very many who had been there for twenty plus years, you know, and it does take a toll on people and families because one day you had a job. I mean, they gave us notice and all that I had a very good severance package when I left, but still you were without work and it was very hard to provide for your families.

Fox: Earlier you had mentioned that you had to raise a child, about two years old, by yourself. What was it like raising him throughout his life?

Wilson: I would say it is very hard to raise a child by yourself, he had to stay in a nursery and it was hard being gone from him. I always made it up to him; I devoted my life to raising him. I made sure he had what he wanted, and he was a very good child. I did instill respect into him; I taught him how to take care of himself in case anything happened to me. How to pay bills, clean house, and buy groceries, everyday learning how it was when he was older. It did come in handy, when he was in the 10th grade I had to have a bypass. He took care of me wonderfully; he took over all the household duties. He had just started driving and he had to have an adult with him for the first part of it. He drove my parents to Little Rock daily to see me which is wonderful. They were elderly and couldn't have gone without him. They helped me raise him when he was little, and when he started school they would take him and pick him up and keep him until I was done with work. My dad did everything in the world to be the absentee dad that he did not have. His dad chose not to be part of his life, but he's grown up to be a mighty fine young man and I am blessed for that.

Fox: He lives in Arkansas correct?

Wilson: He lives in Searcy, and he is actually the Vice Presidents at one of the bank here over a certain department. I'm very very proud of him, he's made a wonderful life. He attended Harding and I think that's wonderful.

Fox: We've kinda talked briefly about your family life and growing up as a kid, but do you have any special memories of the holidays, like Christmas or Thanksgiving, anything like that?

Wilson: Christmas was always special, we'd always go out and cut our trees down. Then we'd come home and not just one person would decorate it but the whole family would, it would turn into a family togetherness time. Children back then were thrilled over anything they got for Christmas, because you didn't get toys all year long. We didn't complain if it wasn't what we

wanted, but they always tried to get you something you really wanted. You only got a few presents because money wasn't there. Our stockings were, well kids now want DVD or something like that in your stocking. We didn't get that we got an apple or an orange and usually a variety of nuts, we got pecans because it was what we liked. We were thrilled to death to get them because you didn't get that stuff all year long. You might occasionally, but not often. So it was really a treat. We always got together with aunts and uncles and their children. We always met at one aunt's house for the most part or somewhere around where they live. Usually we used an extra room where we would all meet and have a wonderful Christmas dinner. Something we can't imagine having now they cooked so good. It was a time when you were always with family. So many families now don't do it; some people have lost most of their families. Some people have lost most of their families; I have been blessed to get to go with my son and daughter in law to go to Missouri each year for Thanksgiving and Christmas. I only have brothers here, no more aunts and uncles. Well, I have one aunt who's 90 something years old who is in a nursing home. We don't have, well we get together with my family before Christmas. There are a few cousins that get together; we're trying to keep up the holiday spirit together. It's going to be hard as the next generation comes along because the children are so spread out in age. I do enjoy going to Missouri, I have a new family very nice to me. I get to see snow every year except this year. We had a very very mild winter this year. We always get it Thanksgiving and Christmas there. It brings back all the memories I had as a child. My parents would play with us and our new presents until we had to rush and get ready to go to the relatives on Christmas day. Family was a really important part of my life. It wasn't nearly as fun taking the Christmas tree down as it was putting it up. One year we actually got one of those ugly silver aluminum foil looking trees and thought we had something. It sparkled and we thought it was beautiful that

year, but from that point on we went on to Christmas cedar trees. Everybody would get all stopped up because they were shedding or whatever and your body wasn't used to them I guess, but we had them anyway. Like I said, the food was wonderful, I think back then it just brought a closeness to your life. I wish everyone could do that now, we'd get together to sing songs, praise God, and enjoy what time we had together.

Fox: So earlier you had mentioned that your son Brent still lives here in Arkansas and he has a family of his own. Is there anything you'd like to tell us about that family, his family?

Wilson: Yes, I said before that I thought Brent grew up to be a mighty fine man. He has a very nice wife and they have the most wonderful son who will be three years old on his birthday. He has made my life worth living, there's a closeness there that I don't think anybody can take away. Being a grandparent is probably the best thing that has ever happened to me and I'm so lucky that he's close by and that I get to see him whenever I want. I will be able to be another grandmother come May, I'm gonna have a baby girl this time. I'm really looking forward to meeting her. I just cannot believe that being an grandparent is such a wonderful thing. We do a lot of things together, being his "nana" is such a privilege. I'm so proud of my son and wife, they have a wonderful marriage. I'm proud of my son since he was raised just by me; he's such a wonderful person.

Fox: Do you remember much about JFK or the Vietnam War, anything like that?

Wilson: The first thing I remember about JFK is that he came to Heber Springs and dedicated the Heber Dam, which is located just down from the dam site that everyone recognizes now. He was assassinated in 1963, I graduated in 1969, so it wasn't too long that I graduated after he died. He was killed by a man named Lee Harvey Oswald, who in turn was killed by Ruby. It was always talked like that was for a cover up. All the girls always thought he was a nice looking

man, and we'd always tune into whatever he was talking about on TV when we could pick it up. We'd just sit around and watch him, I don't really know for sure. He was a really smart man, and it was nice to always see him on TV being a family man. They'd always show his wife and his children, his son has passed now, which is sad. And his brothers were all politicians too; they're always talking about some of the Kennedys somehow. As far as the Vietnam War I remember it as such a bad war, it's different from now in that it was mainly televised. We saw everything, all the killings. It was a bloody war. It was every night; it started where you would hate to watch it because you would just see so many people getting killed. One of my friends lost her boyfriend in the war right before he was supposed to come home, which touched all of us. I had a friend that told me the story of when he came back and he was in the middle of town traveling in his car and was at a stop sign when a car came up and backfired. He thought he was being shot at and he said he just lost it. Not very unusual for people to talk about that. I've had more people tell me about hearing things that would just cause them to fold they'd be so scared. I've known a couple of people that contracted the Agent Orange and had to be gone and checked regularly. One had a lot of health problems, the other one didn't seem to while I was around him at work, and I'm not sure about his later life. It was back then that people would join the National Guard to get out of going to Vietnam; there was a draft back then. You got called you went, no matter what. Now if you join the Guard you're liable to go over to Iraq and places like that. Back then you could join the Guard and not have to go, or if you were in college they would not make you go. There were ways people would avoid going about the draft.

Fox: How did you and your friends feel about the draft? Were you against it, or did you just kinda feel neutral?

Wilson: I do not like the draft, for the fact that I don't believe that anybody should have to go

and kill somebody if they think it's wrong, which I do. I know you have to protect your country, but there seems to be a lot of people it doesn't bother. I do believe if for religious reasons you do not believe in killing you should not be made to go, it didn't matter back then, you went anyways. Being a girl I guess I feel different than other people. I feel that would haunt me the rest of my life if I knew I had to kill somebody. Everybody says you do it or you get killed yourself, and I guess you would protect yourself, but how do you live with yourself after you do it. Just a different viewpoint. I'm glad we're not in a war like Vietnam. A lot of kids were first introduced to drugs, and I think they took the drugs to keep them from realizing what they were over there doing. There were so many who came back addicted to marijuana and even though they say you don't get addicted to it, I believe you do. It was really really rough on most people when they came back and it should never be.

Fox: To wrap this interview up, is there anything that you wish would happen now that had happened previously in your life?

Wilson: What I wish now is that parents would take care of their children, there are so many that are left at their homes by themselves or by people who aren't really fit to take care of them. There is so much abuse, and kids don't know what it is liked to be loved anymore. At a young age they have no respect; they talk to adults like... well if I had talked like that when I was a kid a spanking wouldn't have even been what I would have got. I feel sorry for children now that are treated badly. You see it a lot in schools and everyday life. They are not taught to mind, they are not taught love. There are so many of them that have never seen the inside of a church. There is so much disrespect. Parents need to get back to the old days and raise their children. Where children know that they are loved and what is expected of them. There are so many intelligent children out there that are looked over because there is no one at home to help them with their

school work or care. Most of them are too worried about their own lives to worry about their kids' life. Maybe with some help or around the community things should be opened up to bring children or families into to make happy homes again. Sitting around with video games from the time they get home to way in the night, we weren't allowed to stay up all night playing games. We didn't have them, but we still had bed times. Children just need some structure. It's such a sad world that so many grown-ups are on drugs. The beatings some of these people give their children... And it's not just that, the spouses too. And it doesn't make a difference if it's men or women that are beating up on the others. It's just such a shame that the world can't be like it was when I grew up when you were taught standards and you abided by them. We were taught no matter who it was if you were told to do something then you did it because that was the way you were raised. One recollection I have is sitting in church one day with a friend. Instead of listening to church we were having our own conversation. It happened that my principal went to church where I did, and was sitting behind me. He tapped me on the shoulder and told me to get quiet. I froze and I did not open my mouth, I sat like a young lady and listened to church. Had I not and he told my daddy... oh I'd have wished I had.

Fox: [laughter]

Wilson: There's just not that fear anymore. Or respect, or whatever you want to call it. We were taught that. None of that is taught now. We had good times back then; just about everybody you knew went to some church or the other. We were involved, we had a good time, and friends were made for lives. For me to remember that my principal did that from the time that I was maybe in Junior High and I'm sixty years old now... So to remember that it stuck with me. The things you teach your children now will last for a life time and just hope and pray that things get better.